

Make Wales' role in British colonial history a compulsory school subject

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 12 Ionawr 2021
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Petition title: Make Wales' role in British colonial history a compulsory school subject

Text of petition: Currently the debate around race is very much in the forefront of everybody's mind. As majority white population this it is a fortunate position that we can choose when we think about race. For many in the BAME community this is not a choice but a daily truth. Wales and Welsh people played an active role in British Colonial history. With figures such as Thomas Picton later celebrated with statues.

This area history is wrought with complexities and many uncomfortable truths that we as a population must address and scrutinise. For many the existence of racism and racial discrimination in society is seen as an issue in other countries but not here. I believe this is strongly linked to a lack of teaching on the colonial history of this country.

There is a similar petition gathering signatures for the UK government to address. I believe we should also address this here as a devolved issue.



1. New curriculum

Subject to the Senedd passing legislation, the new age 3-16 Curriculum for Wales will be introduced in all maintained schools and publicly funded nursery settings from September 2022 on a phased basis. The [Curriculum and Assessment \(Wales\) Bill](#) was introduced to the Senedd on 6 July 2020. The Bill sets out the four purposes of the curriculum:

- To enable pupils and children to develop as ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives;
- To enable pupils and children to develop as enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work;
- To enable pupils and children to develop as ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world;
- To enable pupils and children to develop as healthy, confident individuals, ready to live fulfilling lives as valued members of society.

The Welsh Government has emphasised that the new Curriculum for Wales will be **purpose-driven rather than content-driven**. Specific learning content is not stipulated in the same way as under the current national curriculum.

The Bill sets out six Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLEs) for the new curriculum and the mandatory elements within them. The AoLEs are:

- Expressive Arts
- Health and Well-being
- Humanities
- Languages, Literacy and Communication
- Mathematics and Numeracy
- Science and Technology.

The mandatory elements within the AoLEs will be English; Relationships and Sexuality Education; Religion, Values and Ethics and Welsh.

History will be taught within the [Humanities AoLE](#). The Humanities AoLE also encompasses geography, religious education, business studies and social studies. The new curriculum is non-prescriptive and does not include a list of topics that all schools must teach.

The Bill provides for a 'What Matters Code' to set out key concepts of learning and experience in each AoLE (including Humanities) and that schools' curricula must

encompass each of these concepts. The Welsh Government has published 'Statements of What Matters' in the [Curriculum for Wales documentation](#). This is intended to provide the 'national approach' which the [Minister for Education says](#) will ensure consistency for learners.

The [provisional statutory guidance on the Humanities AoLE](#), was published in January 2020.

The Welsh Government's [Guidance to help schools and settings develop their own curriculum](#) (part of the statutory guidance) contains some specific guidance for teachers in designing history in their curriculum. This states that school curriculum design should (amongst other things):

- develop a rich context for exploring the concepts of governance, economy, power, leadership, diversity; culture, ethnicity, equality and inequality, justice, rights, conquest, social, political and economic ideologies, social organisation and structures, trade, agriculture and industry, power and protest, peace, conflict and cooperation, revolution, devolution and empire

2. Welsh Government action

In July 2020 the First Minister appointed a Task and Finish Group to audit public monuments, street and building names in Wales associated with the slave trade and the British Empire and also touching on the historical contributions to Welsh life of people of Black heritage. The objective of the audit was to collect and review the evidence, after which the Group were to identify issues for a possible second stage. The Task and Finish Group comprised independent members led by Gaynor Legall and supported by a project officer and officials in Cadw.

The report, [the Slave Trade and the British Empire](#), published in November 2020 identified 209 monuments, buildings or street names, located in all parts of Wales, which commemorate people who were directly involved with the slavery and the slave trade or opposed its abolition.. The document states that it seeks to capture information, not provide a set of answers.

The First Minister said in a [Written Statement](#) on the publication of the audit:

this is the first stage of a much bigger piece of work, which must now, collectively, consider how we move forward with this information as we seek to honour and celebrate our diverse communities. I will not pre-empt any recommendations that may come from this wider work but

this audit must be the start of an open conversation with our communities.

On 21 July 2020, Kirsty Williams, the Minister for Education announced that Professor Charlotte Williams OBE, would chair a Communities, Contributions and Cynefin: BAME Experiences and the New Curriculum Working Group. The group will review existing resources available to teachers and good practice, and professional learning related to Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities. The interim report was published on 19 November 2020. The final report is due to be published in early spring. The report said in relation to colonialism:

It is clear from the initial review of resources that there is a need to change the narrative around the teaching of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic themes. Existing resources are disproportionately focused on slavery, colonialism and Empire. This needs to be balanced with resources focusing on the wider histories of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities in Wales and on the contributions of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities in contemporary society.

It also said:

It was felt that more could be done to monitor the resource content hosted on Hwb, which has resulted in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic resources that are out of date, of various quality, and not appropriately contextualised within the history and development of Wales. [...] There is nothing that offers an overall framework or chronology of the history and development of diversity and race in Wales, acknowledging Welsh migration history, industrial development and involvement in colonisation and imperialism.

One of the recommendations was:

The development of a new suite of bilingual teaching and professional development resources that provide a detailed exploration of diversity in Wales in the past and present. These background papers, servicing all AoLE, should include [...]

- a narrative guide to Wales' role in British colonialism;

3. Welsh Parliament Action

[The Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee](#) is currently undertaking an inquiry, Re-examining public realm commemoration, which is looking at the way historical figures are remembered in Wales' significant public spaces. The First Minister has said that he is keen to see the outcome of the inquiry work before the Welsh Government make any decisions about the next steps.

The Culture, Welsh Language and Communications Committee has previously undertaken an inquiry into the teaching of history. Its report, [Inquiry into the teaching of Welsh history, culture and heritage](#) [PDF 1.2KB] was published in November 2019 and was debated in [Plenary on 15 January 2020](#). The Welsh Government published its [response](#) [PDF 235KB] on 8 January 2020

The Committee made a number of recommendations including that Estyn should undertake a thematic review of the teaching of history including an assessment how diversity is currently taught in schools. The Welsh Government accepted this and the Estyn review will be closely aligned with Professor Williams' work.

4. UK Parliament Petition

A similar petition, [Teach Britain's colonial past as part of the UK's compulsory curriculum](#) closed for signatures on 10 December 2020. The UK Government has responded:

The history curriculum at Key Stage 3 includes the statutory theme "ideas, political power, industry and empire: Britain 1745-1901". Topics within statutory themes are chosen by schools and teachers. Within the history curriculum there is already a statutory theme at Key Stage 3 titled "ideas, political power, industry and empire: Britain, 1745-1901", as such we do not believe there is a need to take this action as the option to teach this topic exists within this compulsory theme.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.